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SERMON

Preached before the

RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES,

IN

St. MICHAEL's CHURCH

DUBLIN.

September the 25th. 1698.

By Thomas Pollard, Minister of St. Peter's
Dublin.

DUBLIN:

Printed, by and for Joseph Ray, Bookseller in Skinner-row
over against the Tholsel, MDC XC VIII.

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Sciolto il 19/12/1970

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TO THE
Religious Societies
IN
DUBLIN.

BRETHREN,

THÔ I was ready, at your Request, to Preach this Sermon, yet I (must confess I was not so willing to make it Publick; as conscious to my self how much so great and useful a Subject must suffer through the Weakness of the Manager: But when your desires came back't with his Grace's Commands, it was no longer fit for me to dispute the matter.

I am very sensible that besides the Exceptions that may be justly taken against the Imperfections of this Discourse, many Objections will be rais'd, against the Argument it self, which is likely to find the same ill Usage for Encouraging, that you have allready met with for Endeavouring a Reformation: But if the Publishing this Sermon may prove either useful to You or Beneficial to others, I shall, very little Regard the Censures of ill Men; who as they are Enemies to Virtue, so they will be sure to be to all that shall abett it.

To

To the Reader.

To Direct and Encourage the Good Work you have so successfully begun, viz. The beating down the Body of Sin, and putting some stop to that Torrent of open Lewdness and Prophaneness, which for some time past has been breaking in upon us, was the great design of this Discourse; and if it may Influence and Inspirit any of us in so Generous an Undertaking, I shall think my Time and my Labour well laid out. And that GOD's Blessing may always accompany your Endeavours and mine in this Charitable Attempt is the hearty Prayer of

Your Affectionate

humble Servant

Thomas Pollard,

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S E R M O N

Preach'd before the Societies in St. Michael's
Church, Dublin, September the 25th. 1698.

The 19th. of *Leviticus* in the latter part of the
17th. verse.

Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour, and not suffer Sin upon him.

The whole Verse runs thus,

Thou shalt not hate thy Brother in thine heart : thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy Neighbour, and not suffer Sin upon him.

These words recommend a duty as difficult to the Performer, as unwelcom to the Receiver ; and that is *Brotherly Admonition* and *Reproof* : for whosoever shall attempt it (tho' in the greatest kindness to Mens Souls) is in danger not only of being accounted, but of being treated as their Enemy, because he tells them the truth.

'Twas a work difficult enough for a Prophet, and we find God himself intimating, as if there were but few qualified for so generous an undertaking : *Isaiah 6. 8. And I heard the Voice of the Lord saying whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?* Implying that it was no easie matter to find a well qualified and willing Person ; and tho' the Prophet *Isaiah* was prepared and ready at that time to undertake the Employ-

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ment,

ment, yet we find the Prophet *Jeremiah* something backward, bewailing himself and complaining of the hardship of the Duty. Saying, *Wo is me, my Mother that thou hast born me a Man of strife, and a Man of Contention to the whole Earth*, *Jer. 15. 10.*

And therefore to arm him against all dangers and difficulty of the undertaking, God does not only cheer him up, but threaten him too, *Thou therefore gird up thy Loins*, i. e. rouze up thy Spirits and thy Courage, and arise, speak to them all that I commanded thee, be not dismayed at their Faces, lest I Confound thee before them. *Jer. 1st. 17.* And whether they would hear, or whether they would forbear, God oblig'd him to discharge this necessary, tho' unwelcome office towards them.

And with the same caution God arms *Ezekiel* upon the like occasion, *And thou son of man be not afraid of their words, tho' Briers and Thorns be with thee*, i. e. tho' this people be as Briers and Thorns, which shall prick and wound thy Soul, *And tho' thou dost dwell among Scorpions, be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks*, *Ezek. 2. 6.*

And if a Commission'd Prophet was to expect such Treatment, when he was sent by God to rebuke a wicked Nation, how much rougher usage must a private Person look for, when he undertakes to Reprove a wicked and licentious People? and to reform those Vices which by a long and general Practice and Indulgence, are not only grown fashionable, but have gotten Credit and Power in the World? insomuch that he that dares attempt a Reformation, must look for nothing less than to be torn with *Briers and Thorns*, and to be the object of all the Venom, that the Tongues of these wicked *Scorpions* can spit against him; but God that knew the danger does not excuse from the duty, but lays his commands peremptorily thus, *Thou shalt in any wise Rebuke thy Neighbour, &c.*

And tho' this Precept was given under the Law, yet it is of that *Moral Obligation*, that it is not superseded, but rather reinforced by the Gospel Dispensation.

I shall

I shall not at present confine these words (as some understand them) in Relation only to the former part of the Verse. *Thou shalt not hate thy Brother, in thine heart, i. e.* Thou shalt not bear any private Malice or Grudge against him, and smother it in thy breast, as *Absolom* did against his Brother *Amnon*, for the Text says, *He spake unto him neither good nor bad*, and gives this as the reason, *For Absolom hated Amnon*, 2 Sam. 13. 22. But thou shalt make known the cause of the Difference and Displeasure, and shalt in any wise plainly rebuke him for it. Tho' this be an excellent duty, and may prove the prevention of many great and grievous Evils, yet I shall at this time treat of these words in a greater Latitude, even as they respect Sin in general and not only some trespass committed against our selves.

And in handling of them in this larger sense, I shall follow this method.

1. I will endeavour to make it appear that it is the Duty of a private Christian, as much as in him lies, to Reprove and Reform Sin in his Neighbour.

2. I shall shew you the manner how this duty is to be perform'd.

3. The Motives and Reasons that may encourage him in so difficult a performance.

1. I shall endeavour to make it appear, that it is the duty of a private Christian, as much as in him lies, to Reprove and Reform Sin in his Neighbour.

To prevent Sin, and destroy the works of the Devil, is so Noble and generous a design, that for the accomplishment thereof our Blessed Saviour thought it worth while to leave all the Glorious Mansions of Heaven, to descend into a wicked World, and to submit himself to the most barbarous Treatment it could give him ; and his great business here was to save his People from their Sins, that they being deliver'd from their Spiritual Enemies, might become a peculiar People zealous of good works, and might serve God without fear, in Holiness and Righteousness before him all the days of their life.

And

And if it be our Duty to learn of Him, and endeavour to be like him, we are certainly oblig'd to promote the good of Souls, as much as in us lies, and to be willing to run some hazard, to be at some cost and pains for the rescue of a poor Soul, which was so precious in the eyes of Christ, that he thought it worth dying for ; he came into the world on purpose to do Kindnesses to the Souls of Men, even to turn us from the Errors of our ways to the living God.

The very first act that a Christian does in behalf of himself, is solemnly to engage in a war against the Devil and all his Works, against all the deceitful and wicked Pomps and Vanities of the World, and all the sinful lusts of the Flesh ; and that sacred Vow does oblige us by all lawful ways and means to prevent and destroy all these, as well in others as our selves ; and if we neglect it, we make our selves partakers of their sins.

Even under the Law they were enjoyn'd to Rebuke Sin in their Neighbour, and not to suffer sin upon him : Some translate it, Thou shalt not bear Sin for him, by which is sometimes understood the Sin it self, and sometimes the Punishment thereof. And truly he that neglects this Duty among his Friends and Equals, when 'tis fit to perform it, makes himself liable to both.

And this neglect in the former part of the verse, is called *A hating our Brother in our heart* ; for so some apply that part of the Verse, and not without reason ; for what hatred so deadly as that which tends to the utter ruin and destruction of a Soul ?

What was spoken by the Prophet Ezekiel of the Watchman, to whom the charge of the People was committed, and was by virtue of his Office oblig'd to give the People warning of their Danger, is in some measure applicable to every Christian, who is so far a Prophet, as to be oblig'd to prevent Sin, as far as lawfully he may, and in any wise to warn and rebuke his Neighbours, when an opportunity and fit Circumstances do offer. And in this respect why should we grudge any one the honour of rescuing a Soul from Death ? ought

we not all much rather, to joyn in *Moses's* passionate Prayer ;
Would to God that all the Lords People were Prophets, and that he would put his holy Spirit upon them.

The punishment that God threatned the Prophet with, in case of neglect is very dreadful ; *His blood will I require at thine hand.* Now thô this be more particularly the duty of a Minister, who is intrusted with the cure of Souls, and design'd here by the name of a Prophet, yet private Christians are not altogether free from the Obligation, but even a meer Laick may draw the blood of his Brother upon his own head, and by a silent approbation of his Sin make himself liable both to the guilt and punishment ; and every Man is so far engag'd against the common Enemy, as to take his Brothers part, and rescue him out of his hands, as well as he is bound to defend himself.

Our Blessed Saviour enjoyns this private Admonition in these words, *If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone, if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.* And thô these words speak only of a trespass committed against our selves, yet if we love God as we ought, we should sure be as much concerned for him as we are for our selves. And 'tis a sign that we have little zeal for the Glory of his Name, when we can patiently hear it blasphem'd, and see his honour trampled upon by wicked and prophane wretches, and sit contentedly by, and neither say nor do any thing to retrieve and vindicate it ; sure we could not think him our Friend, that could silently and contentedly stand by, and see any of our selves thus rudely treated and abused.

'Tis the same private reproof that St. *Paul* means by his first and second Admonition ; *Titus, 3. 10.*

And the end of all this is in the expression of my Text. *Not to suffer Sin upon our Brother ;* or as St. *James* expresses it, *The converting of a Sinner from the error of his ways.*

And were our love to our Brother, of the same kind with Christ's love to us, we should not need many arguments to

convince us of our obligation to this Duty ; that Love alone would soon put us upon the discharge of it ; 'Tis a very powerful Passion, where it is sincere ; it will not stick at Niceties, or be discouraged with every seeming Difficulty. And we know 'tis our duty to love one another, as he loved us. And if his love was so great to the Souls of Men, as to think the Redemption of them worth the infinite value of his own Blood, sure, to render our love, in any degree like his, we are certainly oblig'd to lay out our most vigorous endeavours towards the conversion of one another, and be as solicitous for the prevention or removal of Sin, as of the Plague, for indeed the former is as catching, and more fatally mortal than the latter.

Who could stand patiently by, and see his Friend about to take deadly Poyson, or throw himself off a dangerous Precipise, and not use his utmost endeavours to prevent such a mischief ? And is it not much more barbarous and inhumane to stand unconcernedly by, and see my Brother Sin a Sinner unto Death, and so ruin Himself, Soul, and Body, to all Eternity ? And yet never make one step towards his rescue and deliverance. Sure did we know the worth of a Soul, or had any Bowels and Compassion for our Brother, we should with the same earnestness endeavour his preservation, that the Angel did *Lots*, even by calling upon him, and leading him by the hand, and forcing him out of *Sodom*, warning him of his danger, and with the same zealous concern bidding him escape, *Neither stay thou in all the plain, least thou be consumed* : And indeed he that can't find in his Heart, to do something towards the conversion of a Sinner, nay to run some hazard, and be thus importunate, when he sees his Brother ready to tumble in Hell, has sure very little of this heavenly Angelical Temper in him, very little value for a Soul, which Christ thought so precious, and less of Christian Love and Resolution in him, he falls far below the Character of the more generous Heathens, who look'd upon the preventing of Sin and Error in their Friend, as the most sacred Office of their Love and Friendship,

Friendship, and upon this account look'd upon their Friend as their Guardian Angel, or rather as their own Conscience, whose business it was, not only to direct them in their Duty, and forewarn them of their danger, but also to check and reprove them when they did amiss, and wandred out of the ways of Truth and right Reason.

And sure Christianity does not supersede, but improve and exalt this excellent and necessary duty. And by how much we have more noble motives for the performance of it, by so much are we the more strictly oblig'd to the Conscientious discharge of it.

And thus having proved that it is the Duty of a private Christian, as much as in him lies, to reprove and reform Sin in his Neighbour; I come in the second place to shew you how this Duty is to be performed.

And that is first of all by instructing the Ignorant, and that both as to the *Credenda* and *Agenda* of their Religion: For as many Sin against light, so some Sin for want of it; and it is noble charity, to give Eyes to the Blind, to give Light to them that sit in Darkness and the Shadow of Death, and to guide their Feet into the way of Peace. But thô this may tend very much to the Reformation of our Brother, yet it is properly rather to Direct than Reprove.

2dly. There is a way of reproving Sin by the contrary example of Holiness and Virtue, and when Sin has not taken too deep a root, this may prove an excellent method for the reclaiming of Sinners. For the exemplary Piety and Holiness of a good Man, is such a Check and Reproach to the Ungodly, that like the *Ark* and *Dagon*, one cannot stand before the other.

But if the Contagion of Sin be spread and grown so inerterate, that Example alone cannot Shame and Master it, yet it will still have the Advantage of giving the more Force and Efficacy to our Reproofs; it will convince them that we are sincere and in earnest, when they see us so Zealous in the Practise of that our selves, which we would so earnestly recommend

commend unto them. But it will be a hard matter to per-
suade any man to believe and practice that, which, by my
own Actions, that by most People are look'd upon as
the most sensible and convincing Arguments, I do plainly de-
monstrate, I neither believe nor practice my self. How apt
will every one be to retort my Rebukes, with a *Physitian heal
thy self*; or rather with a *Thou Hypocrite, first cast the Beam
out of thine own Eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull the
Mote out of thy Brothers Eye.* He that is guilty himself is not
fit to stone Sin in another.

3dly. Our Rebukes and Reproofs of our Brother, ought to
be insinuated with all Tenderness and Brotherly love, that
they may plainly perceive our design is to save their Souls,
and not to Gratifie our own, or others Spleen, in exposing
their Persons and Reputations.

And that we may the better insinuate our kind concern for
them, we must observe, as near as we can, the *Mollia Tem-
pora fandi*, the season and circumstances that are most likely to
render our endeavours successful; least otherwise it should ap-
pear that we design rather to Upbraid, than Reform them.
And then 'tis likely they will rather grow worse than better
under our Admonitions, as 'tis thought the Physick that
does not Master, does irritate and ferment the evil Humour.
And therefore we ought to use the greatest caution and pru-
dence, that our Reproofs, (according to the observation of
a great Divine) may come as the Fathers thought Grace did
to the Elect, *Tempore congruo*, in a fit season, not when they
are in the heat and Career of their Sins, but as God did to *Adam*,
in the cool of the day, when the temper of the Wax may make
it more capable of an impression, lest striving to stop the Ra-
pid Stream in 'its force we make it swell and overwhelm all
before it.

Reproofs ill placed look more like the Attacks of an Ene-
my, than the Rebukes of a Friend, and they will sooner Ex-
asperate than Reform the Delinquent. And therefore, when
there is any hopes of doing good this way, this gentle me-
method

thod should be always used, before we proceed to rougher treatment ; we should try if the pouring in the precious Balm of Reproof will do the work, before we proceed to break their Heads by the severity and Penalty of the Laws.

But 4. sometimes the wound is more dangerous, and will perhaps need Incisions and rougher Applications ; sometimes the Sin is deeply rooted by a long Custom, and is become not only fashionable, but has gotten Credit as well as Ground in the World, and then People Sin on with a stiff Neck, and a high Hand, and a Crest lifted up ; and when the Man becomes so exceeding Sinful, then Reproof will be lost upon such obstinate Sinners, all this precious Balm will like Oyl to the Fire, make it flame the more. Thoſe are the People the wise man speaks of, *Reprove not a Scornful leſt he hate thee.* Prov. 9. 8. He means such as are Incorrigible, have ascended the Chair of the Scornful, and are become presumptuous, open and daring Sinners ; such, as the Hereticks of old, are to be rejected, and the precious Pearl of Reproof are not to be cast before such Swine, leſt, like the evil Spirit, they turn upon thee and tear thee. But here we are to call in the help of the Civil Magistrate, who should be as the Apostle speaks, the Minister of God, *a Revenger to execute wrath upon him that doth evil,* Rom. 13. 4. And let him look to it, if he bears this Sword in vain, he makes himself partaker of other mens Sins, draws a vast guilt upon his own head, and his Doom will be so much sharper, as his Trust was greater than other Mens.

But thanks be to God, who has not only given us good Laws, for the suppression of Vice and Reformation of Manners ; but has also inspired some of our Magistrates with so much Courage and Zeal for God and Religion, as resolutely to put these wholesome Laws in Execution, maugre all the Interest and Malice of a wicked, Prophane and Licentious Faction.

And since we have not only good Laws but good Magistrates, who do so Zealously abett the cause of GOD and Practical Holiness, we ought not to be faint-hearted, in so good a cause, but where Brotherly Admonition will not, or is not likely to take place, there to appeal to the Civil Magistrate, and to pray the assistance of the Sword of Justice, for the cutting down those Sins, which were too strong and powerful for any private Reproof.

I told you before, that by our Baptismal Vow, we are all engag'd to resist and prevent Sin, as far as lawfully we may; and when 'tis not probable that the best Arts of Perswasion and Reproof will take place, but men are become so obstinate, and desperately wicked, that they are not to be awakened by all the terrors of the LORD, then 'tis high time to try if the Sword of Justice will deter them, or have any better influence upon them; and to this end we may justly and fairly complain to the Civil Magistrate, and desire the execution of the Laws against such scandalous Offenders.

And the reproach of being call'd an Informer, ought not to discourage us, or to quench our zeal for GOD's Glory and the good of Souls; and tho' a sort of men among us are reviled and hated for no other reason but discharging a good Conscience in this matter, yet they do no more than what the Law it self as well as Conscience does allow of and encourage. Or else how should Convictions be made, or Offenders brought to condign Punishment? What would Laws signify, when no man had care or zeal enough to see them executed and take effect? How should the Magistrate take Cognizance of Delinquents when each connives at the others wickedness?

What if some people reproach you as too busy and forward; if we will be Christ's Disciples, we must exercise more self denial than that amounts to. The

The word Informer, may be taken in a good as well as in a bad Sense, according as it is apply'd. The Odium that was first derived upon the name, was in the early persecutions of the Church, when the Christians lost both their Lives and Estates by the Heathenish Informers; but as it was an Enemy to Virtue then, so it may be to Vice now; and if it be really so, if it tends to the Promotion of Piety and Reformation, it can be no inglorious name, unless it be a crime to suppress Sin, and to root out the Lewdness and Prophaness which will bring a Curse and Destruction upon a Nation. Would he deserve to be Branded with an Infamous Character, that should discover to the Magistrate such Treasonable Practises as tended to the utter Subversion of the State and Government? Ought he not rather to be Encourag'd and Rewarded? Or is it less meritorious to Inform in the cause of GOD than of the King? And is there a greater Enemy to any Nation than the Vices thereof? Does any thing tend more to the Ruin of a People, than Debauchery and Prophaness, and the Contempt of GOD and Religion? Did we ever see a Kingdom brought to Misery and Desolation, where the wickedness and unrestrain'd Lusts of the People had not the chiefeſt hand in it? And does he deserve ill of the Common Wealth, or any name of Distinction, that is not kind and creditable, that does all that lies in his Power to suppress those Vices, that would ruin a Nation, and have a natural as well as moral tendency to draw down the ſevereſt Judgments of GOD upon a Land? The best actions are likely to be misreprefented by ill men, especially if they create any unquiet to them, and disturb them in the enjoyment of their Lusts and Sensualities; he that attacks them here, touches the apple of their Eye, and must expect all the ill usage that their Rage and Malice can ſuggest.

This

This is the Root of all, and the true reason why some men are so inrag'd at Informers, and if they would lay their hands upon their Hearts, and impartially examine them; I suppose their own Conscience would hardly give them leave to deny it.

But thô those people rage and swell, and conspire together against the LORD, and all that are Enemies to their Lewdness and Prophaness, yet all this ought not to quench your zeal for the Advancement of Holiness and GOD's Glory. But go on resolutely in this good work, comforting and encouraging your selves with St. Peter's words, *If ye suffer for Righteousness sake happy are ye: For as our Saviour says, great is your Reward in Heaven.*

And the most effectual way to conquer their Malice, and disprove their Calumnies is, as the same Apostle advises, *Resolutely to maintain a good Conscience, that where as they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, they may be asham'd that falsely accuse your good Conversation in Christ,* 1 Pet. 3. 16.

The Informer that is so odious amongst Men is one that does Vexatiously prosecute his Neighbours, meerly out of Lucre or Malice, without any regard to the Service of the State, or the Reformation of Offenders. But this is far different from his case, who out of a due regard to Virtue and the Glory of GOD, cannot patiently bear the trampling upon either, without interposing his endeavours for the preservation of both, whether it be by friendly Reproof and Admonition, or when that won't, or is it not likely to prevail, by applying to the Magistrate, who bears the Sword of GOD, and is bound to wield it for the support of Virtue and Religion, and for the Punishment and suppression of evil doers. And when neither Malice nor Lucre comes in for

for a share, but the Glory of GOD, the eternal welfare of Souls, and the good of the Kingdom are the sole motives of such Information, the name of Informer is so far from being a Reproach, that it ought to be had in honour with every man that loves GOD or his Country, or has any kind regards to Virtue and Religion.

And so I proceed to the last Particular, *viz.* To shew the motives and reasons that may encourage you in so difficult an undertaking.

I have already told you, that some by this Phrase of not suffering Sin upon him, do mean thou shalt not bear Sin for him, or make thy self partaker of his Sin: And if so, then the neglect of rebuking a Sinner when my kind Reproof may tend to the reclaiming of him, is to make me partaker of his Sins, and I am oblig'd to discharge this Charitable office to my Brother, as I love my own Soul, and would not bring my self under his Condemnation.

2dly. If men would be so kind to themselves or others, as to suffer themselves to be perswadēd into a Conscientious discharge of this Duty, what a happy Change and Reformation might we soon expect in our little World! Especially did the more Holy, Wise, and Pious, faithfully and zealously ingage in it. How would Sinners be ashamed and blush at their Villanies! We should have no more bare-fac'd wickedness, but Sin would sculk into the Corners of darkness, and what a blessed Reformation would ensue! This precious Balm of Reproof is the most likely medicine to heal up our breaches, and to cure the wounds and putrified sores of GOD's People

David calls it an excellent Oyl: *Psalm. 141. 5.* an Oyl that has two soveraign qualities, those of Cleansing

and Healing: this Reproof searches the ground of the Heart, and when that is well prob'd and made clean, it soon heals the breaches thereof. 'Tis an excellent means to awaken the conscience of the Sinner, and to set it upon the discharge of her office; even to check us for our miscarriages, and forewarn us of the dreadfull expectation of the just Judgments of GOD, and consequently puts us upon a diligent enquiry, which way we shall escape, and secure our selves from the wrath to come?

Hence it is that the Wise Man tells us, that *The Rod and Reproof give wisdom, and that he that hateth Reproof is brutish.* And so highly did he esteem of this method of reducing a Sinner, that if this repeated could not reform him, he seems utterly to despair of his conversion, *He that being often reproved hardneth his Neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without Remedy.* Prov. 29. 1. Intimating that if this method fail'd, nothing would be effectual.

But thirdly whether Sinners will hear or whether they will forbear, whether they will take warning and be converted or not, the faithful dischargers of this Duty will have this remaining comfort, They will be sure to save their own Souls, whilst the Obstinate and Incorrigible shall perish in their Iniquities: Thus St. James assures us, that *he that converteth a Sinner from the error of his way, shall save a Soul alive, and shall cover a multitude of Sins.* James, 5. 20. i. e. of his own Sins; For as the former part of the Verse contains a motive taken from the advantage that accrues to the Converted, so the latter is an argument drawn from the benefit that redounds to the Convertor, viz. He shall hide a multitude of his own Sins. i. e. GOD will the easier be perswaded to be propitious to him, and upon his repentance

repentance. (which must always be suppos'd) forgive him those Sins he had formerly been guilty of, and I the rather take this to be the sense of the words, because it is exactly agreeable to that of *Daniel*. *They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the Firmament, and they that turn many to Righteousness as the Stars for ever and ever.* Dan. 12. This is such an exceeding and an eternal weight of Glory, that I can say nothing greater; and therefore shall leave off here; desiring you to consider the weight and efficacy of this Motive; and shall only remind you, that since the effects of this Duty are so blessed, and the Reward so Glorious we ought not to be discourg'd in it, either thro' the fear of singularity, censoriousness, or any dirt that a malicious people can bespatter us with: Remembering that it is commonly the fate of Christ's Disciples, *That if in him they have peace, in the World they shall have Tribulation.* And our Saviour himself does assure us, *That narrow is the Way, and streight is the Gate that leads to Life, and few there be that find it.*

Now to GOD the Father, GOD the Son, and GOD the Holy Ghost be ascribed all Honour, Power and Glory, for ever and ever.

F I N I S.

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